

Deaf awareness

A beginners guide

Communicating with a D/deaf or Deafblind person

- Eye contact is important.
- Speak clearly and directly to the D/deaf or Deafblind person, using gestures and facial expression will help.
- Not all D/deaf / Deafblind people communicate using Sign Language, remember to ask the person their preferred method of communication.
- BSL is a visual language and has no written version. It is a language in its own right and does not follow the same order or structure as English.



Rephrasing

- If a D/deaf / Deafblind person does not understand you, they may ask you to repeat what you are saying.
- It may be better if you rephrase the sentence or words rather than trying to repeat it repeatedly.

E.g. 'Make an appointment for next week' can be rephrased to 'come back in 7 days'

Lip reading

- Do not turn your head away – eye contact is important.
- Do not shout – this will only distort the sound.
- Use clear lip patterns.
- Do not over exaggerate your facial movements.
- Make sure the light is on your face.
- Cut out as much background noise as possible.
- Use gestures and facial expressions.
- Do not cover your mouth with your hand or anything else.
- Tell the D/deaf or Deafblind person what you are/ will be talking about.
- Let the D/deaf or Deafblind person know if you change the subject.
- Use plain language – many words look the same on the lips.



Guidelines for Using an Interpreter

- Make sure the interpreter is qualified, regulated, and independent.
- Avoid using a family member or friend.
- The interpreter should sit opposite the Deaf person i.e. next to the speaker.
- Always direct questions to the Deaf person, not the interpreter.
- Plan meetings / appointments in advance and where possible always keep to the confirmed date. This is important, as it can be difficult to book interpreters at short notice.



There are only around **1,500 qualified Interpreters** throughout the U.K and **87,000 Deaf people** who have BSL as their first/preferred language.

Deaf awareness in a healthcare setting

Hints & tips

- Ensure your record system can record communication preferences and provide an alert as soon as the D/deaf or Deafblind person's file is opened.

For example: face the person, speak clearly, book BSL interpreter for appointments etc.

- Use plain English when contacting a D/deaf / Deafblind person by letter / email / text message.
- Display all communication options clearly on all communications.
- Provide effective training to all front-line staff e.g. Deaf Awareness Training, British Sign Language Training.
- Review signage from the main door to the reception area to make sure it's both clear and accessible. Install an accessible system to 'call' patients to the consulting rooms e.g. Visual Display.
- Make sure the patient has been made aware that their name has been called, and if needed take them to the consulting room.



You can do this by walking over to them and attracting their attention. Pass on communication needs to the person carrying out the appointment.

- Install a Loop system for hearing aid users, ensure this is switched on when required and regularly maintained.
- Undertake an access audit with recommendations on how to make your service accessible for D/deaf and Deafblind people.